

Ring In The New Year

January 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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Ahead of Session ...

... A Thank You from Executive Director Sean Casey

A part of life in public service is eventually saying goodbye to people you respect and care about as term limits come up, elections are held and together we witness a peaceful transition of government, all of which is a hallmark of American democracy. While our state celebrates the excitement and promise brought by the swearing-in of a new Governor, we also fondly look back on eight years with Gov. Deal, without whom Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) would literally not exist.

In 2012, Gov. Deal had the foresight to acknowledge that Georgians with disabilities needed their own agency to provide specialized services and counseling. Out of this foresight, House Bill 1146 was born. It created an organization that would integrate vocational rehabilitation (VR), residential services, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB), and Disability Adjudication Services (DAS), thus streamlining processes, improving collaboration and communication, and providing a one-stop for VR resources.

The Governor's commitment to all Georgians didn't end there. Over his two terms, his efforts and leadership across the workforce system have created more than 750,000 new private sector jobs, translating to more opportunities for those seeking community employment. He also pushed groundbreaking criminal justice reform in a society where those with disabilities are incarcerated at a significantly higher rate. His innovative ideas reduced the need for 5,000 prison beds and focused on rehabilitation over punishment.

Finally, we are only now exploring the possibilities created by the Employment First Act, which the Governor signed into

law in May 2018. Promoting employment as the first and preferred option for people who want to work in inclusive environments, the Employment First Council is now focused on the important work that will yield future policy and legislative recommendations.

Personally, I have been deeply moved by the Governor's support when my daughter was hospitalized due to some health problems upon her birth. Today, she's a healthy, happy eight year old, but this dad will never forget the kindness of a Governor who paused a meeting to ask about her wellbeing during a very tough time in her young life.

As an organization, GVRA continues to be truly blessed to have the friendship and guidance of an overwhelming number of Georgia leaders. From the Governor's Office to the General Assembly and also our state workforce partners, I know you will join me in sending our best to those public servants who will be working on behalf of all citizens this session.



2019 Legislative Preview

By GVRA Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller



With the new year comes the start of the 2019 legislative session, as members of the Georgia General Assembly prepare to convene. Every year, we track those bills that hold the potential to impact GVRA, our clients and the disability community

as a whole. Session always starts on the 2nd Monday in January. This year, lawmakers convene on January 14th and will meet for 40 nonconsecutive days.

Bills prefiled for the 2019 session:

House

HB 1: Revise the name of the special needs scholarship

This bill would change the name of the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship to the Sen. Eric Johnson Scholarship.

HB 5: Georgia Prospective Employer

This bill would prevent future employers from looking at and basing salaries on past jobs.

Senate

None tracked at this time.

2018 session review:

HB 831: Georgia Employment First

This bill, in which GVRA played an integral role, created a 14 member council with the purpose of producing biannual reports that make policy and legislative recommendations promoting successful Employment First implementation. The Council is made up of various representatives from different areas of the

disability community and leaders from agencies serving individuals with disabilities.

HB 673: Driving while Texting

This bill targeted distracted driving within the state. Signed into law in Spring 2018, it does not only make it against the law to hold or text on your phone while operating a motor vehicle but also makes it illegal to send emails, surf the web, write instant messages, or record video.

SB 118: Update to Age Limit for Insurance Coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders under Ava's Law. This bill extended the age cap for insurance coverage for treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders from six years of age to 20.

Study Committees:

Home and Community Based Services:

These are services that support a person with a significant disability in living and working in their community. Lead by Sen. Jesse Petrea of Savannah, the committee was established due to an identified need for more home health care workers. The Committee is currently seeking community input.

Guide Dogs: The State senate started a study committee to look into the use of ADA covered animals and the new use of emotional support animals. This Committee is looking to change laws for emotional support animals (not ADA covered animals) as there have been an increasing number of related incidents. Find more information [here](#).



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Bruce Williamson



Elected in 2010 to the Georgia House of Representatives, Bruce Williamson serves as a member of the following committees: Banks & Banking, Energy, Utilities, & Telecommunications, Governmental Affairs, Insurance, and Ways & Means. He also serves as the Majority Caucus Secretary/Treasurer. Additionally, the Technology Association of Georgia recognized Bruce as the 2013 Technology Legislature of the Year.

His legislative focus is business and job development, and he is passionate about recruiting new businesses to Walton County and the state of Georgia.

Bruce was born and raised in Monroe, the heart of district 115, in Walton County. He attended Furman University where he played football and earned a B.A. in Business Administration. He then furthered

his studies as a graduate student at the University of Georgia focusing on Risk Management and Insurance.

Through his ownership and management of Williamson Insurance Agency, Inc., Williamson Investments Group, LLC, and as a co-founder of both Walton Bank and Trust Company and Liberty First Bank of Monroe, Bruce has a proven record as a successful businessman in Walton County.

He has shown dedication to the community through work with numerous civic organizations, including the Boy Scouts of America, Healing Angels Medical Clinic, Past-President of the Monroe Rotary Club and the Walton County Chamber of Commerce. His dedication to Georgia is reflected through his service to Leadership Georgia, Inc. where he served as Chairman, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs as past board member and as a current board member of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

He is a recipient of the Leadership Georgia Frederick B. Kerr Award and the Rotary Club of Monroe J. T. Witcher Community Service Award.

Bruce is a man of faith and is an active member of the First United Methodist Church of Monroe, where he taught Youth Sunday School for more than a decade. A committed family man, Bruce and his wife Vickie have been married for 30 years. They are blessed with four sons who are all Eagle Scouts.



Governor Brian Kemp

An Introduction to the Incoming Governor

Provided by the Georgians First Committee

Brian Kemp is a husband, father, businessman, and public servant.

On November 6, 2018, he was elected as Georgia's 83rd governor – earning more votes than any gubernatorial candidate in state history.

Governor-elect Kemp built his first business – Kemp Development and Construction Company – with a pick-up truck and a shovel. Over thirty years later, he is a successful entrepreneur with businesses and investments in banking, farming, timber, manufacturing, and real estate. Kemp served on the Board of Suncrest Stone in Tifton, as a Founding Director of First Madison Bank, and on the St. Mary's Hospital Board in Athens.

From the backhoe to the boardroom, Governor-elect Kemp understands how to successfully create jobs, grow companies, recruit start-ups, and make deals on the international stage while also providing opportunities for hundreds of hardworking Georgians.

Out of frustration with government, Brian Kemp ran for public office in the early 2000s. In the State Senate, Kemp was instrumental in fighting to cut fees, taxes, and mandates on job creators and Georgia families. As Secretary of State, Kemp utilized technology and innovation to cut bureaucratic red tape, slash spending, and streamline government.

As governor, Brian Kemp will fight to make Georgia #1 for small business through regulatory reform. He will ensure that all parts of our state - including rural Georgia -

have opportunities to grow and thrive.

Kemp will fundamentally reform state government, keep our families safe, and will always put hardworking Georgians first.

Kemp, 55, is married to the former Marty Argo of Athens. They are the proud parents of three daughters – Jarrett, Lucy, and Amy Porter - and are active members of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. For more information, visit www.GeorgiansFirstCommittee.com.



The Unveiling

Governor Deal's Official Portrait



Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal were on hand in early January for the unveiling of their official portrait. The portrait, completed by artist Tom Nash, will hang in the Capitol and be a testament to their shared legacy.



Two Clients' Stories

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

It's been a long and winding road to employment for Blair Hanton. But since this young man from Pooler received much needed assistance from GVRA, he has found fulfillment and happiness in his life.

Blair, who is now 21, became a VR client in 2015. Initially a client of CRC Jessica Stewart and then CRC Frenchy Wilkerson with CA Jamie Herbster, he received a host of services from the agency. Among these were services he received at Roosevelt Warm Springs. While there, he obtained his driver's license, his forklift certification and customer service experience in the area of stocking.

Additionally, Blair received counseling with a benefits navigator because he's receiving SSI benefits. Later, in Pooler, Blair received traditional supported employment training through Marvin Curtis of Family Restoration Network. Mr. Curtis also helped Blair improve his interview skills as well as assisting him in locating a job. Currently Blair is working 25 hours a week at Publix.

He works as a stock clerk, and he earns \$9.25 an hour.

Concerning Blair's sentiments about his employment, he very much enjoys working at the store. In fact, he likes working at this location so much that he wants to have a career there. To top it off, management, for their part, is very impressed with this young man.

Blair said he has been very satisfied with his experience with the organization. He felt that those who worked with him, including Ms. Stewart and Ms. Herbster, were very attentive and responsive to his needs, and that they played a large role in helping him find a job.

In addition, he loved his time at Warm Springs; besides receiving training there, he made many friends. Because of his very favorable impression of VR, this young man would definitely recommend the agency to anyone who has a disability and wants to work.

GVRA has played a much needed role in helping one man become more productive in his community.

Eric Cannon became a client of GVRA because, according to him, he has "a disability and needed assistance finding a job." On becoming a client of the agency, he was both anxious and excited about the prospect of working. After interviewing him, CRC Charles Graddick devised a plan to help him accomplish his goal by providing Eric with services such as job readiness (which he received at Easter Seals) and Community Work Adjustment Training.

encouragement, Mr. Cannon was able to find work at Food Lion in Americus. He is employed 20 hours a week as a maintenance person. In this capacity, he cleans the floors and restrooms, as well as keeps the aisles neat. For his efforts, this young man earns \$8.00/hr.

As a result of his experience with the agency, Mr. Cannon spoke very highly of it. He felt the staff was very helpful and friendly, and those who worked with him listened to his concerns. He would gladly recommend GVRA to anyone with a disability who has the desire to work.

As a result of Mr. Graddick's direction and

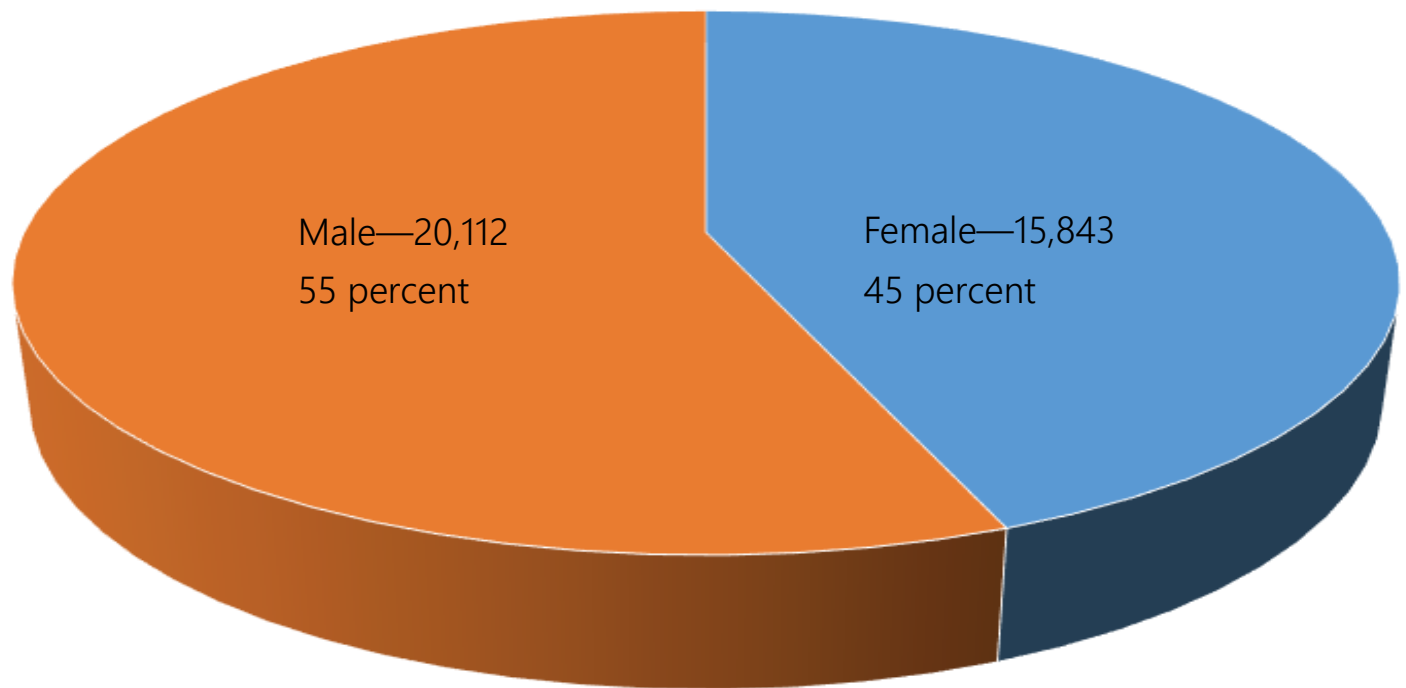


Let's Do the Numbers

Clients Served by Gender

NOTE: All numbers were taken from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2018, which ran from Oct. 1, 2017 to Sept. 30, 2018.

The total number served is **36,002**. Roughly 40 individuals chose not to identify their gender, and roughly 10 individuals recorded their gender as unknown.



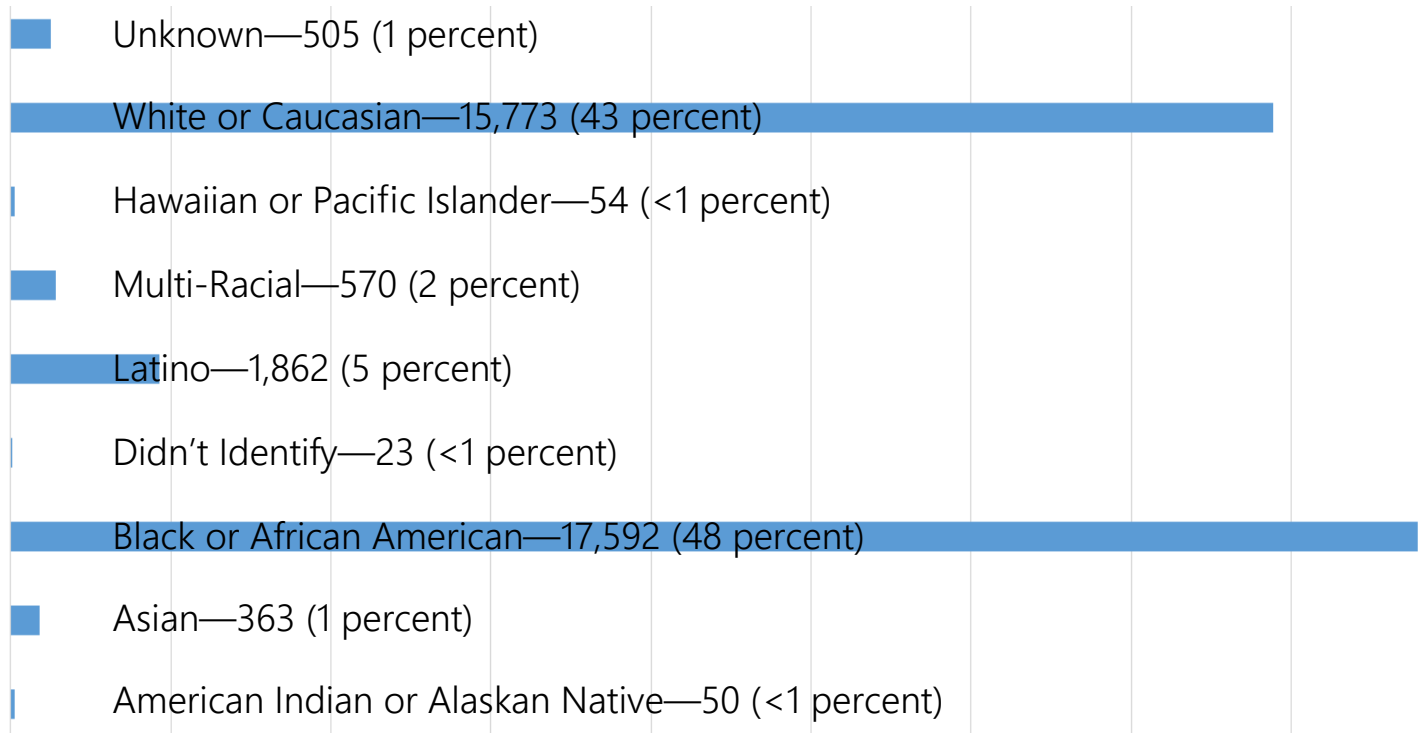
Clients Served by Age and Gender

NOTE: Roughly 40 individuals chose not to identify their gender, and roughly 10 individuals recorded their gender as unknown.

Under Age 18			Age 18-24			Age 25-30		
	Under 18	Under 18		18 - 24	18 - 24		25 - 30	25 - 30
Under 18	Male	Female	18 - 24	Male	Female	25 - 30	Male	Female
3,245	2,055	1,178	16,136	9,884	6,225	3,763	2,081	1,680
Age 31-39			Age 40-54			Age 55+ >		
	31 - 39	31 - 39		40 - 54	40 - 54		55 and Over	55 and Over
31 - 39	Male	Female	40 - 54	Male	Female	55 and Over	Male	Female
3,495	1,723	1,771	5,559	2,582	2,975	3,804	1,787	2,014

Clients Served by Race and/or Ethnicity

NOTE: Individuals who identify as Latino and another race were not categorized as Multi-Racial, and thus, the numbers below will total more than the total number of clients served.



Clients Served by Education Level

Clients Served By Level of Education	Clients_Served
Bachelor's degree	751
Elementary education (grades 1-8)	248
High school graduate or equivalency certificate	4,499
Master's degree or higher	266
No Formal Schooling	30
Post-secondary education, no degree	2,651
Secondary education, no HS diploma	6,403
Special Ed (completion or attendance)	4,032
Vocational /Technical Certificate or License	903
Unknown	16,219
Grand Total	36,002

Clients Served by Disability

Disability	Clients Served
Blindness	847
Cognitive Impairments	13,185
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	611
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	415
Deaf-Blindness	45
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	185
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	638
Dexterity Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	26
General Physical Debilitation	1,026
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	580
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	143
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	432
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	1,625
No impairment	43
Not Available	20
Other Hearing Impairments	41
Other Mental Impairments	1,492
Other Orthopedic Impairments	549
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	1,612
Other visual impairments	704
Psychosocial Impairments	7,068
Respiratory Impairments	179
Severe visual impairment	1
Unknown	4,535
Grand Total	36,002



Studies have shown that consumers prefer to do business with companies who employ workers with disabilities.

Closed Cases by Disability with their Avg. Earnings

Disability	Closed_Clients	Average Weekly Earnings
Blindness	35	\$417.72
Cognitive Impairments	824	\$300.49
Combination of Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	40	\$275.66
Communicative Impairments (expressive/receptive)	18	\$331.24
Deaf-Blindness	1	\$640.00
Deafness, Primary Communication Auditory	9	\$440.39
Deafness, Primary Communication Visual	54	\$325.00
General Physical Debilitation	56	\$347.23
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Auditory	91	\$466.18
Hearing Loss, Primary Communication Visual	14	\$522.17
Manipulation Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	26	\$344.63
Mobility Orthopedic/Neurological Impairments	95	\$358.73
No impairment	2	\$560.44
Other Hearing Impairments	6	\$384.77
Other Mental Impairments	125	\$300.60
Other Orthopedic Impairments	33	\$424.62
Other Physical Impairments (not listed)	69	\$368.63
Other visual impairments	29	\$468.32
Psychosocial Impairments	631	\$314.59
Respiratory Impairments	11	\$395.56

Return on Investment

In addition to the thousands of dollars companies can receive in tax credits for every individual with a disability they hire, conservative estimates show that every \$1 spent on helping such a person go to work generates \$3 in return to the economy at large.

In Georgia, this translates to an ROI of more than \$200 million annually.

Source: GVRA SFY 2018 Vocational Rehabilitation Budget

Graduation at CSC

Congrats to the Graduates!

Dr. Lee Brinkley Bryan speaks to the winter graduating class of Cave Spring Center in December.



A Happy Reunion ...

... 10 Years in the Marking

From Sign1News

Candace Jones remembers when she was a young girl trying to make the right decisions for her life. When she graduated, she set up an appointment to meet Bob Green, her first Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and a man who would later go on to serve on the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services board.

This was roughly ten years ago, and since then, she has gone on to be an anchor for Sign1News, a news outlet out of Atlanta aimed at making the stories of the day accessible to a deaf audience.

"I called to set an appointment to meet in person. I was shocked when I found out he was a Deaf VR counselor," Candace said. "I was so excited. We just talked and talked."

Recently, Candace got to thank him in person for the huge role he played in helping her succeed in life.

Bob was the recent winner of the Sign1News

"Become a News Anchor for a Day" contest.

"Candace has always made good decisions and good choices for her life," he said. "Even though she did go through some hard times, she made it through."

Now Bob not only gets to watch his former client inform the world on the new of the day, he gets to join her. And he couldn't be prouder.

"Now Candace is an adult, a teacher, works for Sign1News, is a mother of two children," Bob said. "I am very proud of her. Every time I see her, it warms my heart."

Candace said that the experience working with Bob again has been a good one.

"It feels kind of ironic. He supported and helped me, and now the rolls are reversed," Candace said. "As an adult, I have a Master's degree, a job as a teacher. He really made my life blossom."



BEP Happenings

Here's What Has Been Going On

By Administrative Operations Coordinator Charlotte Walker

BEP is excited about our newly revamped snack shop at the State Capitol for the upcoming Legislative session. Last year's success with selling fresh salads and sandwiches has lead us to supplement that with a limited variety of hot food options this year. The locations will be managed by

Amy Refoua (Blind Vendor) with assistance from Phillip Hodges (Licensee Candidate).

The location will open January 7th with a limited menu and go full service on January 14th 2019.

APB on KPI's

Strategy and Innovation Wants to Hear From You

The Office of Strategy & Innovation would like to remind all coworkers that it is in the process of developing Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for all Administrative Offices as well as Programs (VR, DAS, BEP, GIB and RWS/CS) from data collected via surveys, state and federal audits, Town Hall meetings and suggestions from Program Directors.

Once S&I has gathered all data, it will present what has been collected to GVRA leadership who will then make final approvals. Once approved, final KPI's will be shared with staff.

A Key Performance Indicator is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an organization is achieving key business objectives. Organizations use KPIs to evaluate their success at reaching targets.

KPIs then guide an organization on the journey towards its strategic goals. They are an important component of the information needed to understand an organization's progress, and they allow for unified planning across different programs and parts of larger companies, governmental entities and businesses.

"The Office of Strategy & Innovation believes staff have a lot of great ideas about how we can continue to progress and optimize how quickly and efficiently we can do our jobs better," said S&I Director Raj Gandy. "At the end of the day, it's all about continuous improvement to our internal customers and external customers (clients/claimants) with Key Performance Indicators that will create positive change that help to improve our services as well as the lives of the people we serve."

GVRA New Hires

Welcome Aboard!

This month, we welcome a new class of recent GVRA hires. If you see any of these folks, make sure to make them feel welcome!

Kiavanna Browjn (DAS Stone Mt.), Jada Browne (DAS Stone Mt.), Kowanna Clemons (DAS Stone Mt.), Courtney Dordoye (DAS Stone Mt.), Sherisse Edmead (DAS Stone Mt.), Terki Matthews (DAS Stone Mt.), Cesalee Morrow (DAS Stone Mt.), Assyria Reynolds (DAS Stone Mt.), Kimberly Ryan (DAS Dalton), Nadine Talbot (DAS Dalton), Angela Thomas (DAS Stone Mt.), Letitia Ford (VR Griffin), Lisa Pierre (VR Swainsboro), Lakecia Reynolds (VR

Brunswick), Claudette Hillman (VR College Park), Patricia Jones (VR Tifton), Shamyla Evans-Patrick (VR Atlanta) and Joanna Ross (VR Reidsville).

In addition, Jacqueline Word (DAS Stone Mt.) and Renee Giedl (VR), both retired in December. Congrats to both of you for a long career, and thank you for your service.

On a somber note, GVRA lost one of its own in late December. Bonita Roach, retired office assistant for Metro and West VR, passed away. Keep her family in your thoughts.

DAS Employee of the Month

The following nomination was submitted by Patty McMurray in the category of Agency Commitment:

Delisa Brengettsy exemplifies agency commitment every day in how she handles each and every case assigned to her. She has received several kudos from medical consultants and quality assurance reviewers commenting on her thoroughness in documenting claims and making correct decisions in a timely fashion.

She recently received positive feedback from QA reviewer Stacey Kelley who noted, "I was impressed with the quality of bookmarks. Ms. Brengettsy documented the evidence in a way that made it clear that she had a solid understanding of what information was relevant and necessary to evaluate this claimant's impairment. I also

noted that she developed the case proactively by requesting evidence and additional source information that she identified as necessary from the very beginning of case development."

This is just a small sample of the type of work that Delisa does every day. For this reason, I am nominating her for Employee of the Month.

Way to go Delisa!

Turning the Page

The Dec. 2018 RWS Graduating Class

For 54 graduating students, the middle of December marked the end of their time at Roosevelt Warm Springs. As they walked across the auditorium stage to receive their diplomas, so many of them remarked on how they had changed since they first came to RWS.

And in record-breaking fashion, 63 percent of those students were either working, scheduled for interviews or involved in volunteering activities.

This marks the highest success rate for any graduating class RWS has hosted in recent

years, and it's testament to the hard work and dedication of the students and RWS staff alike, said Residential Services Director Lee Brinkley Bryan.

"So many people have worked so hard to help these students get ahead," she said. "We're proud of the people they've grown into, and we know that wherever their careers take them, they will be a success."

RWS hosts two graduations annually: one in June and one in December. For more information on RWS or to attend one of the graduations, call (706) 655-5000.



Questions and Answers

By Executive Director Sean T. Casey

As a leadership strategy, I believe communication is essential to keep an organization healthy. Technology makes things much easier now than even just a few years ago, and I have the benefit of sharing news with my coworkers via email and social media. Those information channels are convenient and quick, but I still subscribe to the philosophy that nothing takes the place of people, face-to-face, having an honest conversation. That's why one of my favorite parts of the job is the town halls we held around the state in the later part of last year. That's not to say your questions were always easy, but I appreciated every one of them.

In this newsletter, I want to recap the most commonly asked questions that emerged at our meetings and share the answers once again with everyone.

Q: We did not receive performance-based raises last year. Will we be eligible for performance-based raises this year?

A: I realize other non-monetary incentives are appreciated, but we all have financial obligations and like to see our hard work rewarded in our paychecks. The ability to provide performance-based raises is dependent on our state budget allocation. For our current state fiscal year, we are operating on a flat budget. The allocation for the upcoming fiscal year will be determined during legislative session, which begins January 14th.

Q: Who is eligible for potential raises based on the supplement Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) has requested in the budget?

A: The supplement request is for a 2% state allocation increase for certain client-facing positions. Those state funds would then generate federal match. The priority positions identified to receive any potential raise include Counselor, Counselor Assistant and Employment Specialist.

Q: What process should we follow if we have a safety concern regarding a local office?

A: Nothing is more important than your safety. If you have a concern, follow the proper chain of command to share it with myself or Deputy Executive Director Kevin Harris immediately. Our Office of Facilities has already provided security options to several offices, such as installing reception windows, cameras and access controls, and adapting the layout of workspaces so that coworkers are never approached from behind.

Q: How do we balance our need to market our services with our ability to serve clients efficiently?

A: Our Communications and Marketing team plans all advertising campaigns with the guidance and assistance of the programs. Based on volume, needs and priorities, our messaging is rotated to highlight services for different client populations (transition age, sensory, general) and alternated with business outreach.

Q: What is happening to improve the speed of hiring?

A: Our Human Resources (HR) team recently identified areas that cause potential delays in onboarding and is actively implementing strategies for improvement. One goal is to create continual postings for high demand positions so that candidates can be identified upon vacancy. Additionally, HR will develop industry-aligned compensation schedules to establish consistent points of reference for salary offers. However, we will not be eliminating steps in our background check process, as we are fully committed to the safety of our clients and to each other.

Questions can always be shared via the email address TeamWorkTalkBack@gvs.ga.gov or SeanCasey-GVRA@gvs.ga.gov.



**“Believe and act
as if it were
impossible
to fail.”**

~ Charles Kettering

Thanks!

By Communications Manager John Boan

I've said it before, but I won't grow tired of saying it. So thank you to everyone who contributed to this month's issue of the GVRA monthly newsletter. As a resource, it has come a long way in the last five years, and I believe it's one of the premier publications for an organization our size.

That said, it wouldn't be possible without a village. Thank you to everyone who made this month's issue possible. As always, if you would like something included in a future

issue, or you have a question or comment regarding this publication, please let me know. My email address is john.boan@gvs.ga.gov, and my office door is always open (I'm in a cube).

I look forward to seeing what this newsletter will continue to grow into in 2019, and I look forward to all of you coming along for the ride.

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